

**RECORD OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION
WITH
MR. JOHN KANE
PASSENGER ON BOARD THE U.S. SMALL PASSENGER VESSEL
*PORT IMPERIAL MANHATTAN***

4 PAGES (INCLUDING COVER)



National Transportation Safety Board

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RECORD OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

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NAME OF PERSON INTERVIEWED: Mr. John Kane
Naples, Florida

INTRODUCTION

I interviewed Mr. Kane in connection with the investigation of the fire on board the U.S. passenger vessel *Port Imperial Manhattan*, which occurred while underway in the Hudson River near New York, NY, on November 17, 2000. Mr. Kane was a passenger on board the vessel at the time that the fire broke out. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of my conversation with Mr. Kane. It has been constructed from my hand-written notes of the conversation and is correct and complete to the best of my recollection.

CONVERSATION

Mr. Kane boarded the *Port Imperial Manhattan* around 7:00 – 7:15 p.m. on November 17, 2000 to travel from Manhattan, New York to Weehawken, N.J. Mr. Kane does not regularly ride the New York Waterways ferries. He lives in Florida and was in New York for a company meeting at his company's headquarters in Weehawken, NJ. On the day of the accident, Mr. Kane had been visiting the New York Stock Exchange on personal business and was returning to Weehawken. When he went on board, Mr. Kane entered the main passenger cabin and proceeded aft along the port side and took a seat near and facing the door to the engine room. Mr. Kane stated that when he came on board he did not receive a safety briefing.

Shortly after the vessel left the dock, when it was about 100 – 150 yards offshore, Mr. Kane began to smell an odor like burning rubber. No one else said anything to him about the odor at this time. However, there were only two or three other passengers inside the main cabin with him at the time. One woman was seated in the middle row of seats and the others were seated on the starboard side, forward. It was Mr. Kane's perception that the rest of the passengers were on the outside deck, standing near the rail. He said that there was no crewman in the main passenger cabin at this time.

Mr. Kane saw where the life preservers were stowed when he came on board. He saw them stowed underneath the seats near the door to the engine room.

About five minutes later Mr. Kane started to see smoke coming from the door to the engine room.

A short while later, two crewmen came down to the main cabin and discharged a fire extinguisher on the fire. When that fire extinguisher was empty, the crewmen ran out apparently to get another extinguisher because they returned in a short while with a new extinguisher, which they also discharged into the engine room. But conditions continued to get worse. The smoke got "real thick" and Mr. Kane could see flames coming out of the engine room door. He stated that he was still inside the main passenger cabin at this time and estimated that he saw the flames 5-10 minutes after he first smelled the odor.

All of the passengers assembled on the bow of the boat near the rail, exterior to the main cabin because the smoke and the fire got worse and worse. He said that passengers moved out of the cabin on their own as well as at the instruction of the crew. There was "a lot of smoke coming out now." Mr. Kane estimates that the fire had been burning for about 10 minutes at this point. He said the inside cabin area was "totally smoked out." [I interpret this to mean that the cabin was completely full of heavy smoke.] At some point, the vessel lost electrical power and it began drifting down the river with no lights.

At this point, with the cabin filled with smoke and flames visible from the engineroom, the two crewmen began dragging a life float down from the top of the vessel. Mr. Kane figured that somebody needed to get life jackets. So he ran back into the cabin and retrieved as many jackets as he could carry. He said that he "would be damned if he was going to go into the Hudson River without a life jacket at night." He said that he went back to the area of the engine room door where he knew life jackets were stowed to get them. He stated that he had previously injured his hand and that while he was making his way back to the bow with the life jackets, he had trouble seeing where he was going in the heavy smoke and hit his injured hand on something, causing him pain. He said that his right arm is still a little sore. Mr. Kane was very definite that the crew did not give him a life jacket.

Mr. Kane said that the passengers were visibly upset about their situation. He said that he did not know if any of the passengers could swim, but it looked like they were going to have to enter the water.

While the passengers were assembled on the bow after all of the passengers had donned life jackets, an explosion occurred somewhere inside the vessel. [Mr. Kane characterized the explosion as a "real big explosion."] When this happened, the passengers became really concerned about their safety. At the same time, a New York City fireboat was on its way to the scene. Mr. Kane said that there was a second explosion that occurred at the time that the passengers were just stepping onto the other ferry that rescued them.

Mr. Kane and the rest of the passengers were taken to the Weehawken ferry terminal where they were met by ambulances. Mr. Kane was taken to Palisades Hospital where he received oxygen treatments for smoke inhalation. He said that he was given oxygen for a couple of hours before he was released around 2330 – 2400. He said that he was sick to his stomach for the next 3-4 days, but does not report any other problems.

Mr. Kane expressed his opinion that the stowage of the life jackets all the way aft inside the passenger cabin was probably not the best location.

Mr. Kane also noticed that the life float was very heavy. He said that the crew had to drag the device down from the top of the boat. Mr. Kane said that he and another passenger actually lifted it over the rail, put it into the water, and lashed it to the rail. He expressed the opinion that the device was too heavy and that it was not stowed in a manner that would have facilitated launching it in an emergency.

Mr. Kane said that the crew appeared to know what they were doing, but that they didn't really say too much to the passengers during the emergency. However, Mr. Kane felt that the first thing that should have been done was that life jackets should have been handed out to the passengers, and that was not done.

Mr. Kane expressed the opinion that if there had been 50-60 people on board the ferry when the fire broke out, they would have been in serious trouble because there would have been people in the river.

END OF INTERVIEW

**Donald J. Tyrrell
Investigator-in-Charge**